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# ***Languages of land, water and 'tradition' around Lake Mutirikwi in southern Zimbabwe***

Joost Fontein\*

## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the deployment of a vocabulary of water and land in the rhetoric of power, resistance, and the politics of identity of clans and individuals around Lake Mutirikwi in southern Zimbabwe. When the Mutirikwi (Kyle) Dam was built during the colonial period of the 1960s, local communities lost a great deal of land, both beneath it and around it. Peoples' memories and claims over land that has, in effect, disappeared – alienated by water or appropriated to become commercial farms, a recreational park and game reserve – have not been obliterated. In recent years, disputes over these stretches of land have re-emerged in the context of the government's 'fast track' land reform programme. This paper explores the roles that clans claiming 'original ownership' of land have played in that land reform. In particular, it considers how some spirit mediums – representing the ancestral owners of the land who ensure its rainfall and fertility – have attempted to engage with new nationalist political rhetoric about land reform, in an attempt to substantiate their individual authority, the particular land claims of their clans, and broader social concerns about the role of 'tradition' and the ancestors in Zimbabwe today.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the politics of 'water' and 'land' around Lake Mutirikwi in Masvingo Province in southern Zimbabwe. It begins with, and builds on, the basic point that it is impossible to understand the history of water in Africa without due consideration to the history and politics of land.<sup>1</sup> The construction of the Kyle Dam involved not only the physical

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appropriation of land which was submerged under the rising waters of Lake Mutirikwi, but also the alienation of the landscape around it, which became a recreational park and a game reserve. In this sense the building of the dam was not only destructive of the environment, but also productive in that it enabled the realisation of new imagined landscapes, including the waterscape of the lake itself. But these new landscapes were not inscribed onto empty space; and rather than having been obliterated, the memories and history-scapes (Fontein 2006b) of clans whose land was taken have continued to be invoked in local struggles and disputes over land, identity and authority. Most recently, these memories and claims have emerged in the context of the government's *fast track* land reform programme.

The second part of the paper focuses on some of the languages and practices of water and land that are being deployed by different actors in the context of land reform around Lake Mutirikwi. As Chaumba *et al.* (2003b: 585, 604) have pointed out, ongoing land reform in Zimbabwe has 'dramatically altered the physical landscape', and brought about a complex 'new political terrain' that has 'created new livelihood opportunities and new spaces of authority'. Their work in Chiredzi has highlighted a tension exploited by different people involved with land reform, between 'first, a nationalist argument about land as a resource for the people and, second, an argument akin to the South African concept of "land restitution"' (*ibid.*: 594). Focusing closely on the occupations of a particular piece of 'state land' by members of the Haruzvivishe house of the Mugabe clan, and the activities of one VaDuma spirit medium called Ambuya VaZarira, I argue that related to this contrast are different techniques and languages of water and land, which appeal to different ways of perceiving and dealing with landscape. Importantly, in those 'minor theatres of power' (Worby 1998: 563) that exist in the 'new political terrain' provoked by land reform, actors are able to draw upon and articulate *both* the techniques and languages of 'formal, technically planned, fast track land resettlement' (Chaumba *et al.* 2003b: 597) *and* those that invoke a 'traditional' relationship to specific landscapes based on the ancestral ownership of land that is demonstrated through the provision of fertility and rain. The articulation<sup>2</sup> of these practices and languages of water and land demonstrates that struggles over land, the environment and resources cannot be reduced to simplistic distinctions between exclusively different ways of understanding, perceiving or dealing with landscape. Rather, actors are able to employ a variety of different rhetorics and practices, languages and techniques, of water and land in their continuing struggles for identity, authority and resources.

Although this paper's focus is on the activities and concerns of one particular group of people invoking very particular memories, practices and claims to the landscape, it should be recognised that these are located in, and reverberate within, a broader complexity of imaginations and languages of water and land, which draw in not just local clans and their spirit mediums, and war veterans and land occupiers acting out fast track land reform, but also older migrants to the area as well as members of various missionary and independent churches.<sup>3</sup> This complexity is, of course, also mirrored in longstanding tensions within state institutions at a local level, similar to those Spierenburg (2004: 40–7, 104–38) has discussed in relation to the Mid-Zambezi Rural Development Project in the Dande. Much research remains to be done into the intricate interrelations between those acting out fast track land reform, and the differing imaginations and practices of landscape and water employed by such other, sometimes overlapping, interests.<sup>4</sup> My aim here is not to smooth over these ripples of complexity, but rather to explore one particular dynamic in order to illuminate how such interactions and negotiations, whilst acted out through the prism of very localised struggles and disputes, often simultaneously invoke broader imaginations of what the post-colonial state is, and should be.

Therefore the focus of the last part of the paper is on how the rhetoric of 'patriotic history' that Ranger (2004a) identified, is acted out and reformulated in the localised negotiations between war veterans and land occupiers in the area around Lake Mutirikwi, and those asserting 'ancestral' claims to land, and particularly the charismatic spirit medium, Ambuya VaZarira. Of course, I am sensitive to critiques about the use of 'super informants',<sup>5</sup> and there is no doubt that in the particularity of her claims, Ambuya VaZarira is indeed unique. But she does not operate alone, and the way in which she and her associates employ their versions of the past, place and landscape in relation to the languages and practices of those acting out land reform, reiterates broader trends in recent anthropological studies which point to the importance of focusing on events on the 'margins' in order to study ideas about the 'state' (Das & Poole 2004; Hansen & Stepputat 2001; Tsing 1993, 1994; Worby 1998). Therefore, in conclusion, it is suggested that by studying the micro-politics of land reform in Zimbabwe, within which these languages and techniques of land and water are being articulated, we may gain a closer understanding of how the post-colonial state is always 'in a continuous process of construction' (Hansen & Stepputat 2001: 5): a creative process that takes place not so much at the centre – in government offices or national parliaments – but rather on the margins (Tsing 1993, 1994;

Worby 1998: 184), such as on resettled commercial farms and occupied state land.

#### LAKE MUTIRIKWI AND THE APPROPRIATION OF LANDSCAPE

As Zimbabwe's largest inland lake,<sup>6</sup> Lake Mutirikwi lies within many different, yet overlapping, perspectives of the wider landscape. Any dam is inevitably both a remarkable engineering achievement and the cause of great environmental destruction,<sup>7</sup> but a dam can also be extremely productive in terms of the realisation and imagination of 'nature' and landscape. As Hughes (2004: 32) has shown in relation to Lake Kariba, dam building reveals 'the plasticity of nature – as an object of engineering and discourse'. The flooding of the Mutirikwi and Shagashi river valleys after the construction of the dam in 1960/61, not only caused land literally to disappear under water, but was also accompanied by the creation of the surrounding Kyle Recreational Park, and the game park that lies on its northern shores. For some the lake therefore lies at the very heart of a 'natural' yet 'recreational' landscape that came to exist around it. In such a tourist imagination of landscape the recreational park, with its offerings of waterborne activities like boating and fishing, and the 'natural' gift of game viewing, is 'an obvious resort to pair with Great Zimbabwe' (McCrea & Pinchuck 1993: 200), which lies only 6 km from its southern shore. For conservationists, the game park provides sanctuary for threatened wildlife, particularly white rhino, which were moved there under the questionable belief that game reserves deep within the country, far from international borders, were less threatened by poachers.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, for those concerned with water supplies and irrigation, Lake Mutirikwi relates both to the urban landscape of Masvingo town as its sole water supplier, and to the irrigated landscapes of the vast sugar cane plantations of Triangle and the Hippo Valley which are supplied by the lake, but lie many miles away in the southern lowveld around Chiredzi.

Yet all these imaginations that accompany Lake Mutirikwi are never complete; landscape, as Bender & Winer (2001: 4) have pointed out, is 'always in movement, always becoming', and great water engineering projects often fail to fulfil the imaginations that accompany them. Therefore for hydrologists (Sapa 1994):

Lake Mutirikwi is unreliable because of its small catchment area, and is acutely prone to drought, having filled only once since it was built in 1960. During the catastrophic 1992 drought its level dropped to one per cent, almost eliminating sugar cane production on the vast lowveld estates.

For conservationists too, the dream is incomplete. Apart from the continued threat of poachers, the lake, like others across Zimbabwe, has become affected by the 'water hyacinth problem', caused by the uncontrolled spread of a noxious weed that originated from South America.<sup>9</sup> Related to the spread of this weed, pollution in the form of sewage and industrial chemicals threaten the lake from Masvingo town,<sup>10</sup> further illustrating the fragility of the conservationist vision. Even the lake's position in a tourist imagination of the landscape is fragile and easily undermined, as it has become victim to the collapse of the tourist industry that has accompanied recent political and economic turmoil across the country as a whole.<sup>11</sup> An episode on Lake Mutirikwi in December 2000, when a group of tourists cruising the lake went missing for two days after their motor boat refused to start, because they had filled up with contaminated fuel bought on the black market, illustrates how easily a 'tamed' recreational landscape can become one of fear and danger.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, these incomplete imaginations of Lake Mutirikwi and the surrounding landscape which were enabled through the physical construction of the Kyle Dam, were not simply layered onto an empty canvas, even if colonials may have sought to produce or represent it as such (Jerdin 1999; Noyes 1992). The area subsumed by the rising (and sometimes receding) waters had a long history of invested meanings and imaginations; it was already shaped by the contestations and movement of peoples through it. Like the nearby Great Zimbabwe ruins, the area now occupied by the lake and its surrounding parks, lies within the contested *history-scapes* (Fontein 2006a) of disputing local clans. When the Kyle Dam was built, most of the territory consumed had already been taken for European farms (Mtetwa 1976: 297),<sup>13</sup> but prior to Rhodesian occupation in 1890, the area had been under the authority of the Duma clans of Murinye, Chikwanda, Makore, Mugabe and Chibwe, of which Murinye was the most senior (Aquina 1965: 10; Kaschula 1965: 53; Mtetwa 1976). In the longstanding dispute between the Mugabe and Nemanwa clans that has centred on Great Zimbabwe (Fontein 2006a), members of both have claimed that their territory once stretched from the Tokwe river in the west to the Mutirikwi river from which the lake gets its name (Aquina 1965: 9; VaHaruzvivishe int.). Furthermore, as Mtetwa (1976: 19–20, 44) carefully discussed, even these clans had themselves displaced or swallowed up earlier dynasties in the area. From an archaeological perspective, the rock art found in kopjes to the south east of the lake, and perhaps more poignantly, the possible existence of undiscovered, and therefore un-excavated sites relating to the Zimbabwe culture beneath Lake

Mutirikwi, illustrate the very great depth of past interaction with the landscape now occupied by the lake and its surrounding parks.

If the construction of the Kyle Dam created the conditions necessary for new imaginations of the landscape, then it could be argued that it also brought a definitive end to such older imaginations and meanings. In a sense the construction of the dam, the delineation of the recreational park around it, and the game park to the north, were the very last stage in a process of dislocation and alienation of local African people from the land. Of course, if the lake occupied what had already been delineated as European farms, then the more recent history-scapes of these colonial settlers too, were swallowed up by the rising waters. But apart from the compensation these people certainly claimed, European settlers might also have found some solace in the fulfilment that Lake Mutirikwi provided for a European aesthetic and sentimental need for water in the landscape, which derived from what Hughes has called 'whites' hydrological legacy' (Hughes 2004: 3). Lake Mutirikwi was not only part and parcel of a colonial appropriation of land as a resource, which invoked the technological harnessing of 'nature' for water supply and irrigated agriculture, but was also a cultural appropriation of landscape that strove to satisfy the aesthetic and moral sentiments of white settlers about heroic engineering, scenery, wildlife and 'nature'. Even today, according to Hughes (*ibid.*: 5), 'to a surprising degree, support for conservation in Zimbabwe rests on the sentiments of whites towards water'.

But if the construction of the Kyle Dam and Lake Mutirikwi was not only about the physical appropriation of land, but also the cultural alienation of landscape, then just as the implicated imaginings of Lake Mutirikwi as recreational park, game reserve or irrigation scheme are always incomplete, then so is the actual process of alienation never, in fact, final. As McGregor (2003) has shown, the displacement from the Zambezi river valley, in the north of Zimbabwe, of different peoples – including the Leya, Dombe, Nambya and the Tonga who now live in Hwange and Binga districts – has not stopped their own imaginings of themselves as 'river people', or the articulation of memories of past association with the river for pressing social demands and individual interests in the present. In similar vein, Mazarire's work (2003: 705) on the 'lost chieftaincy' of Chishanga, also in the Masvingo area, has emphasised the significance of the interplay between the physical landscape and memory, between 'real and imagined geographies', in historical struggles that defied colonial efforts of ethnic mapping, and continue in different forms today. The same, I suggest, is true of Lake Mutirikwi, and the surrounding associated landscape. The memories of past social, political and ritual engagements



with the land continue to have a powerful potency ready for invocation by different actors in their complex individual and clan struggles over identity, authority and resources. These memories often focus on very specific geographical features. Both Nemanwa and Mugabe elders whom I spoke to during fieldwork in the area (2000–01) referred to the Mutirikwi river as one of the boundaries of their land, as they feel it once was and indeed should be again. The Mutirikwi river, as a feature of a past landscape now partially disappeared under water, therefore continues to inform struggles in the present. The complexity of such continuing disputes is highlighted if we consider that the same river was invoked in other disputes by Mugabe elders as the historical boundary between themselves and their Duma ‘relatives’ the Murinye and Chikwanda clans.

In the contemporary context of war-veteran-led land reform across Zimbabwe, such historical claims to land have come to the forefront of events around Lake Mutirikwi. Commercial farms all around the lake and its surrounding recreational park were occupied in 2000–01, and most have now been resettled. A prominent VaDuma *svikiro* (spirit medium), Ambuya VaZarira, is involved in efforts to reclaim an area on Mt. Beza on the north west of the lake, which lies within a resettled farm, where she claims the previous medium of her ancestral spirit lies buried. On the southern shores, areas of the Kyle Recreational Park were also occupied, as disaffected members of local communities, particularly of the Mugabe clan, took the opportunity to reclaim what they consider to be their ancestral territory.

#### MUGABE IN THE ‘GAME PARK’

In October 2000 I attended a *bira* ceremony<sup>14</sup> held by members of the Haruzvivishe house of the Mugabe clan, in the context of their reoccupation of an area of land close to Great Zimbabwe, known locally as the ‘game park’. Part of this area lies within the official boundaries of the recreational park, but it also extends up to the boundaries of the Great Zimbabwe estate, and the Masvingo–Kyle Dam road, which marks the boundary of Masvingo Communal Lands. Like much of the local landscape, ownership of this area is contested between the neighbouring clans of Nemanwa and Mugabe.<sup>15</sup> During the colonial period it was part of Mzero farm, which belonged to nearby Morgenster Mission. From the early 1970s, the mission authorities sought to return areas of mission land for local resettlement. The negotiations took a very long time,<sup>16</sup> and were delayed by the onset of guerrilla action in the area from 1976 onwards. Some Haruzvivishe people claim it was formally returned to them by

Morgenster Mission in 1969, but that they did not occupy it immediately because the guerrilla fighters asked them not to, as it lay within their field of military operations and they feared people ‘might be caught in cross-fire’ (Samuel Haruzvivishe, Fred Haruzvivishe, ints.). Immediately after the war, Mugabe people of the Haruzvivishe house reoccupied the area claiming it as their own.

However, while parts of Mzero farm were returned to the Masvingo Communal Lands after the war,<sup>17</sup> the area occupied by these people was never formally earmarked for resettlement.<sup>18</sup> Instead it was viewed as part of an essential buffer zone around Lake Mutirikwi to prevent soil erosion and siltation of the lake, and was designated part of the Kyle recreational park, under the authority of the Department of National Parks. The settlers remained in the area for several years until they were eventually evicted in the 1987 by National Parks acting under the authority of the central government (Chikurira int.). They were told that this was to make room for animals, as the area was to become part of the game reserve. But the animals never came. In Fred Haruzvivishe’s words (int.): ‘So we came here in 1980, and stayed 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986 and then in 1987, they came and told us they wanted to put animals here. So they drove us away, and we stayed somewhere else, but we did not see any animals being put here up to now.’

While resettlement in the area remained prohibited and largely prevented, the ‘game park’ continued to be used for grazing, firewood collection, fishing, and occasionally hunting by people from the nearby communal areas. It never, in effect, became a game reserve in the way that the area north of the lake did. In 2000, taking advantage of the opportunities created by the government’s ‘fast track’ land reform programme, people from the Haruzvivishe house reoccupied the area, and cleared land for fields and homesteads. As Fred Haruzvivishe (int.) explained: ‘Now the government has said that each and every person should go back to their own places and so now we are here on our land.’

These occupations clearly reflected an interpretation of government rhetoric about land reform in terms what Chaumba *et al.* (2003b: 594) have called a ‘land restitution discourse’. This was further illustrated by the *bira* ceremony which was held under a sacred *muchakata* tree (Daneel 1998: 200) in the occupied area. According to some present, the purpose was for Ambuya VaZarira – a senior spirit medium of several VaDuma clans in the province – to ‘sweep the *mapa*’ or graves of Mugabe ancestors buried there, to inform them that the land had returned to the Mugabe clan.<sup>19</sup> The presence of Ambuya VaZarira’s close associate, Mai Macharaga, a war veteran and spirit medium who was then a member of

the District Land Committee, illustrates how the interpretation of land reform as 'land restitution' held currency among those leading the farm occupations, alongside a more general ideology of equitable land distribution.

With such support, the Haruzvivishe people I spoke to were confident that this time they would not be evicted, even though they were occupying not commercial land, but state land under the jurisdiction of the Department of National Parks. Demonstrating also a clear consciousness of official concerns about the protection of Lake Mutirikwi, Samuel Haruzvivishe's son Radison told me that the 'land is coming back to Mugabe, but not as communal land, but rather as plots, so as to prevent soil erosion, and the siltation of the lake' (field notes, 29.10.2000). However, when I interviewed the provincial administrator the following year, he stressed that this was state land, under the authority of central government as a designated game reserve, and because 'national concerns must always override the claims of individual clans', it was inevitable that these 'illegal' settlers would be evicted (Chikurira int.). When I returned to the area in July 2004, the Haruzvivishe occupiers were still there, but the issue had become further complicated by the competing land claims of the Charumbira<sup>20</sup> and Nemanwa<sup>21</sup> clans. Samuel Haruzvivishe complained of Chief Charumbira's influence over the District Land Committees which oversee land resettlement, due to his having been recently promoted to deputy minister of local government.<sup>22</sup> To complicate matters further, apart from the designation of the area as a game park, and the continuing plethora of contested local claims, the area has also been earmarked for the construction of the proposed Great Zimbabwe University.<sup>23</sup> All this suggests that while the occupiers have not yet been removed, their security of tenure over the area is far from certain.

Part of my purpose in discussing this very particular example from a whole country full of similar disputes over land, is to illustrate the historical relationship between a large dam project, and continuing struggles over the surrounding landscape. But there is more to it than that. Beyond merely highlighting the complexity of contemporary land reform in Zimbabwe, which existing literature already does with ample effect (Alexander 2003; Chaumba *et al.* 2003a, b; Hammar & Raftopoulos 2003; Marongwe 2003), I also focus on how different languages and practices of water and land which accompany particular imaginations of landscape, can be invoked in very localised struggles over land. Therefore, while the Haruzvivishe occupiers of the 'game park' asserted their historical right to the land, based on their own memories and imaginations of past occupations and dislocations, they were also concerned to 'package' their

reoccupation of it in a way that made sense to land-use planners' concerns about soil erosion, and the siltation of the lake: hence Radison's emphasis on the planning of the area as plots, rather than 'communal land'. At the same time, by holding a *bira* ceremony within the area, and inviting *masvikiro* such as Ambuya VaZarira, and some of her war veteran associates well known to be involved in land reform, they were also utilising other languages and practices of water and land which invoked other imaginations of the landscape. The invocation of memories of past occupation of land are not simply an appeal to a historical right or precedence – in Chaumba *et al.*'s words a 'land restitution discourse' (2003b: 594) – they are also a moral appeal to an imagination of the way things should be, in which the idea of 'tradition' or *chivanhu*, and ancestral ownership of land, demonstrated through the provision of rain and fertility, play a central role. Therefore, Haruzvivishe efforts to retake land in the 'game park', or indeed to regain the custodianship of Great Zimbabwe (Fontein 2006a, b), relate not only to efforts to re-assert the 'original boundaries' of the Mugabe chieftainship, but also wider imaginations about political authority and the state of the country as a whole. In Samuel Haruzvivishe's terms (int.): 'This hunger, the lack of rain, and the disease [HIV/AIDS] that is happening is because we need to settle the soil. The dust has to settle. People have to follow *chivanhu chaicho*. The problems that exist are because the land is not with whom it belongs.'

In this language of water and land, the well-being of the country as a whole, often framed in terms of adequate rainfall, fertility, health and political tranquillity, depends upon due respect being given to the ancestors (and the *Mwari* cult shrines in the Matopos, see Daneel 1998; Nyathi 2003; Ranger 1999), and of course the restitution of land to its proper ancestral owners, and their descendants. In the rest of this paper, I focus on how both languages and practices of water and land based on ideas of 'tradition' and the ancestral ownership of land, and other languages and practices of water and land based on official, technocratic land and water-use planning, feature in those 'minor theatres of power' (Worby 1998: 594) that have accompanied the decentralisation and 'radical splintering of power over land' (Alexander 2003: 112) associated with Zimbabwe's 'fast track' land reform programme.

#### LANGUAGES OF WATER AND LAND IN ZIMBABWEAN LAND REFORM

The literature on Zimbabwe contains numerous works which demonstrate the close relationship that exists between ancestors, spirit mediums and the divinity *Mwari*, in the provision of rain, managing the environment and

the ownership of land, as well as the continuing political potency of 'traditional religion'. The political aspect is most exceptionally illustrated by the celebrated role of spirit mediums and the *Mwari* shrines during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s (Daneel 1995; Lan 1985; Ranger 1985, 1999; Ranger & Ncube 1995). While the picture of peasant/guerrilla cooperation during the struggle has since been made much more 'ethnographically thick' by the work of Kriger (1988, 1992) and others (e.g. Linden 1980; Maxwell 1999), what is important is that this legacy of cooperation between spirit mediums and guerrillas continues to have a potency ready to be invoked by different players at different levels. Daneel (1998) provides a very good example of how this legacy was invoked by war veterans and spirit mediums in Masvingo for the construction of a new and original, yet 'traditional' and indigenous, approach to environmental conservation in the early 1990s.

My own research around Great Zimbabwe (Fontein 2006a) indicates that this legacy of cooperation between war veterans and spirit mediums is often invoked in the context both of the very localised claims of particular clans over Great Zimbabwe, and of much broader calls for a national ceremony of reconciliation at that site to settle the spirits of dead guerrillas killed during the struggle. More recently this legacy of cooperation between the ancestors, spirit mediums and guerrilla fighters – *vana vevhu* (children of the soil) – has been invoked at a national level in the rhetoric of land reform and 'patriotic history' (Ranger 2004a) being deployed by ZANU-PF. One of the purposes of my ongoing research is, therefore, to investigate how this legacy of spirit mediums' and guerrillas' cooperation during the second *chimurenga* has been and is being enacted and invoked by war veterans, settlers, and spirit mediums, chiefs and other 'traditionalists' involved in the land reform that has been dubbed, not coincidentally, the 'third *chimurenga*' (see Fontein 2006c). A key question is whether (and if so, what parts of) ruling party and state structures are involved in invoking this legacy in an attempt to co-opt spirit mediums, as they have tried to do with that other section of the 'traditionalist faction' in rural Zimbabwe, chiefs and headmen.

Alexander (1995: 175) has discussed how, contrary to expectations of an imminent 'radical redistribution of land and decentralisation of power' in 1980, in actual fact Zimbabwe's negotiated independence both 'ensured the survival of a powerful and centralised state' and, up until 2000 at least, much of the existing land divisions. Similarly, while many commentators predicted the decline of the role of chiefs and headmen, because of their perceived complicity with the Rhodesian state (Lan 1985: 149), in the event there was a re-emergence of their role during the 1980s and 1990s as

the government increasingly offered them concessions in the form of salaries, and a return of some their responsibilities. The recent (1999) Traditional Leaders Act has been seen by many as part of the ruling party's continuing efforts to co-opt chiefs and 'extend its hegemony deeper into rural areas at a time of political discontent' (Chaumba *et al.* 2003b: 599; also Mubvumba 2005).

In contrast, spirit mediums have never been offered any concessions, despite playing a 'supportive ideological role [for chiefs] by providing a critique of certain policies – e.g. dams and villagisation – based on traditional religion' (Alexander 1995: 187). The situation that has prevailed is therefore almost the exact opposite of what Bratton (1978: 50) and others predicted or described in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Now it is chiefs and headmen who receive salaries, hold courts, allocate land in communal areas, and most recently, have access to a government car loan scheme (see fn. 28; Hadzoi 2003; Mubvumba 2005), while spirit mediums receive no formal recognition from local or central government. Spirit mediums I spoke to often said how surprised they were to find themselves so marginalised by the post-independence government. As Ambuya VaZarira (int.) put it:

We were amazed, shocked, because we were expecting a black government would appreciate our work ... Because what is happening today is that we are being labelled '*mweya wetsina*' [dirty/bad spirits]. During the Smith regime we were never labelled that, even though we were not paid, but we were not labelled *mweya wetsina*.

Spirit mediums often express their sense of their own marginalisation by the state in terms of the anger of the ancestors, the 'true owners of the soil' and the providers of rain, at being ignored in political structures. The ancestors, as Vijfhuizen (1999) has argued, are believed to reveal their anger through inflicting drought by withholding rain. Derman (2003: 71) describes how during the devastating drought of the early 1990s,

President Mugabe asked the spirit mediums to bring rain. Many mediums refused. I attended a major spirit possession held by three senior mediums, who refused to pray for rain on the grounds that the president should consult with them on all matters, not just when he chose and not just when there was a crisis.

Ranger (2003: 86) illustrates a similar point when he describes a 'prophetic ecological movement' that 'swept across southern Zimbabwe in the 1990s', led by *Mbuya* Julianna, who sought to 'go and teach the people so they will live again according to law and order, so the rains will come again'. According to Ranger, 'Julianne blames drought on government development plans, imposed from above, and on dynamiting for dams.'

Spierenburg (2004: 171) provides yet another example in her discussion of how, in opposition to the Mid-Zambezi Rural Development Project, spirit mediums in the Dande constructed a 'counter-narrative' in which 'the severe droughts that occurred during the implementation phase of the project were explained as a show of control by the *Mhondoro* over the land, and a sign that they did not agree with the project'. These examples illustrate the continuing salience of the relationship between land, water and 'traditional' political authority in rural Zimbabwe. In a sense, 'traditionalists' and especially spirit mediums, can articulate political, social and moral commentary,<sup>24</sup> as well as asserting their own particular claims, through speaking and performing particular, and highly emotive, languages of water and land which appeal to the spiritual ownership of land and the provision of rain. In this way, for Samuel Haruzvivishe, the current drought and inadequate rainfall in Masvingo district demonstrate both the validity of his land claims, and their desperate urgency.

As Beinart and McGregor (2003: 17) have noted, in much of the existing literature about the environment across the region, 'traditional' religion and African approaches to the environment have often been posited in resistance to the efforts of an over-bearing state, whether colonial or post-colonial.<sup>25</sup> Other studies have emphasised the continuities between colonial and post-colonial states by focusing on the bureaucratic rationalisation of space involved in land use planning, environmental conservation and development (Drinkwater 1991; Ferguson 1990; Keeley & Scoones 2000; Werbner 1999). At first glance, Spierenburg's recent work (2004) represents, perhaps, a good example of this continuing tendency to posit 'traditional' religion in resistance or opposition to unwanted 'developmental' intrusions based on a 'land degradation narrative' (Leach & Mearns 1996). However, she rightly points out (Spierenburg 2004: 6) that the counter-narratives of spirit mediums, like those of land-planners, 'also present neat and clear story-lines which do not always fit the messy and muddy day-to-day reality'. Furthermore, although 'spirit mediums in Dande offer a critique on "modern" land reforms by referring to the past does not mean that they reject "modernity" in general, some of the spirit mediums themselves grow cotton and drive tractors' (*ibid.*: 175). At the same time, while the project staff may have argued that they represented a 'modern' and 'scientific' approach to land management, they were also 'not insensitive to the supernatural threats issued by the possessed mediums' (*ibid.*: 172). Indeed without the permission of the ancestral spirits they refused to go ahead with the implementation of the project, despite pressure from a new ward councillor who was a strong proponent of the scheme.



It is clearly important to avoid reifying static distinctions between a rationalising, domineering and 'de-politicised' development science on the one hand, and a 'traditional' religious resistance on the other. Instead, it may be more appropriate to consider how both languages of water and land that are based on the ancestral ownership of land, and those based on a rationalising, technical and bureaucratic approach, can have an emotive appeal across different social groups. Indeed, two recent studies of natural resource use in rural Zimbabwe demonstrate the flexibility and adaptability of 'traditional' approaches to water resource use which defy a conventional 'dichotomy between development and indigenouness' (Derman 2003: 67), and emphasise the capacity of 'unwritten rules' and 'customs' in communal areas to accommodate change (Nemarundwe & Kozanayi 2003: 206). In this respect, I start from the assumption that the different languages and techniques of water and land deployed by different actors in Zimbabwe's land reform around Lake Mutirikwi are not absolute, irreconcilable positions of principle, but rather strategic invocations of rhetoric and practice, that may beckon towards an emotive distinction between 'tradition' and 'modernity' whilst simultaneously demonstrating its falsity.

Chaumba *et al.* (2003a) have recently argued that despite the portrayal of 'fast track' land reform in Zimbabwe as 'chaotic', 'violent' and 'unplanned', in fact there has been a resurgence of the role of 'land use planning criteria' and a 'technocracy' of land. This is the result of both land settlers'/war veterans' own efforts to gain 'official visibility and legitimacy', and the ruling party's efforts to turn what began as 'demonstrations' into a legitimate government programme. Their conclusion points to the apparent irony that while both war veterans and ZANU-PF have revived anti-imperialist rhetoric that constantly refers back to the liberation war (what Ranger (2004a) has called 'patriotic history'), on the ground the depoliticised language and techniques of land use planning that characterised colonial state interventions and post-independence development have re-emerged in the practices of radicals acting out land reform. Although Chaumba *et al.* (2003a: 534) acknowledge that 'the shortcuts of the land reform process ... opened up a degree of ... flexibility in land use planning and allocation', their argument sidelines and minimises the significance of the very particular and localised negotiations and performances between war veterans, settlers, land planners, party officials, and local claimants such as spirit mediums, chiefs and clan representatives. While it is much less clear to what extent ZINWA (Zimbabwe National Water Authority) officials have been able to implement the water reform process begun with the Water Act of 1998,<sup>26</sup>



I do not deny that extension workers and ‘technocrats’ in the form of AREX (Agricultural Research and Extension)<sup>27</sup> officials have been deeply involved in surveying and pegging land as Chaumba *et al.* (2003a: 544–9) describe. Rather, I argue that both the practices, techniques and languages of water and land that invoke the ancestral ownership of land and the provision of rain, as well as those involving ‘land use planning criteria’ that are more often associated with colonial and post-colonial technocracy, have featured in the localised negotiations thrown up by Zimbabwe’s war-veteran-led land reform.

Elsewhere Chaumba *et al.* (2003b: 585) have focused more attention on the complexity of such localised negotiations. Here they outline the ‘tensions between ... a militarised, modernist order and “traditional” religion and authority [which] have created a complex mosaic ... of multiple and overlapping identities and positions’ on resettled farms in Chiredzi District. Alongside the ‘militarised’ authority of war veterans, there also emerged a ‘new pattern of authority ... characterised by a very hierarchical committee-based structure’ of ZANU-PF dominated land committees at provincial, district and village levels. These ‘new bureaucratic and militaristic authority structures coexist and overlap with so-called “traditional” authority in interesting ways’ (*ibid.*: 599). In particular, they suggest that because ‘traditional’ authority in the form of chiefs and headmen ‘lends legitimacy to the government’s ongoing anti-colonial rhetoric’, the party has continued its efforts to co-opt ‘traditional’ authorities into the land reform programme.<sup>28</sup> This is reflected in the efforts of settlers and war veterans to involve ‘traditional leaders’ in their efforts. Therefore (*ibid.*):

during the land occupations in Fair Range and Gonarezhou, and other farms in Chiredzi district, the settlers were at pains to consult local chiefs, elders and traditional healers on the location of graves and sacred areas. Rainmaking ceremonies were conducted and *chisi* observed. Traditional healers even provided medicines to scare away snakes and other dangers lurking in the bush.

In my opinion, this involvement of ‘chiefs, elders and traditional healers’ suggests that war veterans and land settlers have appealed to both a ‘technocratic’ and a ‘traditional’ approach to land planning. I suggest that they have utilised both languages of water and land that invoked the ancestral ownership of land and provision of rain, as well as languages, criteria and techniques of formal, technocratic land use planning, in their efforts to gain broader legitimacy.<sup>29</sup> But the issue is also deeper than simply a discussion about the techniques and languages used by war veterans and land settlers to gain local legitimacy. According to Chaumba *et al.* (*ibid.*: 600), despite their efforts to involve ‘traditional authorities’ it is

still war veterans who ‘call the shots’ on resettled farms, only involving chiefs once a farm has already been occupied or the land allocated. Therefore, there exists a ‘contradiction between a simultaneously re-invigorated and disempowered chieftaincy’, which has led to ongoing tensions between ‘the new political authority of war veterans and the old authority of chiefs and the ancestors’ (*ibid.*: 600–1). This implies that war veterans and settlers are simply, and cynically, trying to co-opt ‘traditional authorities’ into their project in order to establish local legitimacy, in the same way that the ruling party is trying to co-opt them through giving them formal recognition. What this ignores is the shared war legacy of war veterans and spirit mediums.<sup>30</sup>

Elsewhere (Fontein 2006a, ch. 7), I have argued that during the liberation struggle there were important differences between the ideologies and experiences of the nationalist elite and those of guerrillas fighting in the bush. Whilst the former may have invoked the history of the first *chimurenga* and the role of great ‘national’ ancestors such as Nehanda, Kaguvi and Chaminuka in their nationalist imaginings, for many guerrilla fighters on the ground this theology of nationalism was not so much propaganda as a lived experience. In other words, what the elite might have used as a nationalist ideology became for many guerrilla fighters more than simply a practical means of politicising the masses; it became a way of being, of living and fighting with the guidance of the ancestors.<sup>31</sup> If this was the case for many freedom fighters during the struggle, as the work of Daneel (1995, 1998), Lan (1985) and others, certainly suggests, then it is pertinent to consider to what extent this shared war legacy and lived experience continue to have a powerful potency for war veterans in the third *chimurenga* – the *fast track* land reform programme – far beyond the cynical efforts by government to co-opt chiefs and headmen into their political project. Chaumba *et al.* (2003b: 601) cite an example, which illustrates the point:

Not long after the ten villages had been established ... five of the villages started to be regularly ‘attacked’ by an elephant ... destroying over 30 huts, and chasing people from their fields. As the district War Veterans Association leader admitted, this was a deeply worrying development and it ‘has prompted us to ask questions why this is happening – only one elephant is destroying, yet there are many elephants in Gonarezhou’. The conclusion drawn was that the ancestral spirits of the area must be very angry because there was something about the occupation that was not done correctly – causing offence.

Clearly for some war veterans, incorporating ‘tradition’ and a belief in the ancestral ownership of land into land reform is not merely playing lip service government efforts to appeal to a rural constituency.<sup>32</sup> Rather, it

reflects a genuinely felt belief about the importance of recognising the ancestral ownership of land, guidance for the struggle, and the provision of rain. In the words of VaMhike (int.), then chairman of the Masvingo Provincial War Veterans Association:

*VaMhike*: I understand now ... that all those who left during the armed struggle were inspired somehow by the spirit fighting for war ... The first heroes, Sekuru Kaguvi, Ambuya Nehanda and Chaminuka actually left the war as an incomplete battle. And it was thought strongly that the sons of Zimbabwe should complete the war. And so we were in a situation whereby we had spirit mediums who we had to contact in order to get a way forward. Even in battle, in the field ... we had to consult the spirit mediums ... And they used to tell us or instruct us, or order us: when you are in this area don't do 1, 2, 3 things, you do this and that and that. You [would] have to listen to the instructions from the spirit mediums.

So we strongly believed that the spirit mediums played a role; even now we still believe [that]. Consultations tell us that we still have a role to play as war veterans ...

*J.F.*: So in the third *Chimurenga*, do you, the war veterans, consult the *masvikiro*?

*VaMhike*: yes, we consult ... We have Ambuya VaZarira at Zvishumbe, we have Mai Macharaga at Nemanwa. She is a war veteran, she has been in Mozambique and other places. And we also work hand in hand with chiefs. They advise us on what they got from the *masvikiro*, on what we must do.

Of course, however genuinely some war veterans and others involved in the fast track land reform programme do believe in the role of the ancestors as owners of the land and providers of rain, this does not negate the importance of other factors highlighted by Chaumba *et al.* (2003b), such as party politics, factionalism, personal loyalties, complicated local chieftainship disputes and so on, in determining the 'new politics' and 'new livelihoods' that have emerged as result of agrarian change in Zimbabwe. Nor does the shared legacy of cooperation during the second *chimurenga* mean that spirit mediums are inevitably bound to cooperate with war veterans in the third *chimurenga*; in fact often, far from it. But it does mean that spirit mediums, chiefs and other 'traditionalists' share an understanding or approach – what we could call an 'ancestral language of water and land' – which emerges in the very particular and localised negotiations, discussions and situations occurring on resettled land, alongside the languages, criteria and techniques of formal, technocratic land use planning which Chaumba *et al.* (2003a) claim are also now being reasserted.

From my own experience in Masvingo District,<sup>33</sup> there are some spirit mediums on or near resettled land around Lake Mutirikwi who invoke this shared war legacy and deploy an 'ancestral language of land and water' in

their attempts to solidify both their own authority and individual interests, as well as those of the clans and groups they represent. Ambuya VaZarira, senior *svikiro* for the VaDuma clans in Masvingo, is perhaps the best example. She, like social beings everywhere, is involved in a 'multiplicity of projects' which 'feed on as well as collide with one another' in various ways (Ortner 1995: 191). Her ambitions go beyond the local; that is restoring Great Zimbabwe for the VaDuma clans, or regaining the *mapa* (grave site) of her ancestor VaZarira on Mt. Beza, bordering Lake Mutirikwi. She is involved in much wider efforts, with other *masvikiro* from across the country, and *manyusa* linked to the *Mwari* shrines in the Matopos, to lobby for the role of 'tradition', the ancestors and 'traditional leaders', particularly for spirit mediums and *manyusa* (*Mwari* shrine messengers) to be recognised by the government. In these effort she has made allegiances far beyond her own VaDuma clans, and since 2000 has organised a series of large *bira* ceremonies with war veterans' groups both from local occupied farms, as well as those associated with the Liberator's Platform, who oppose ZANU-PF's land reform policy (Harold-Barry 2004: 31–42). She also made several visits with these groups to the *Mwari* shrines at Matonjeni in the Matobo Hills. At one *bira* at her home, the spirit of the ancestor Murinye possessed her, and spoke directly to the war veterans present:

Referring to the ex-combatants as 'vana vesango' [children of the bush], the spirit Murinye encourages them to work under the guidance of the chiefs and *masvikiro* in the fast track resettlement programme that is now happening across the land.

'Why neglect me after we worked together during the war? I healed the wounded by removing bullets. I helped the poisoned. I worked with the *masvikiro* from other regions, such as those in Chipinge, I even went as far as Mozambique. I gave hope to the comrades, and asked them to take their guns and go and fight. But why is it that you are now forgetting me? Because you have money, because you are driving cars, you forget about yesterday, what service I offered during the war.'

... [later on] ...

The spirit of Murinye then turns to three ex-combatants who are present, urging them to come closer. The spirit asks for and offers them a pot of beer as a token of their part in the fast track resettlement programme, and as a promise that he, Murinye would still accept their request for assistance in what they are doing. The spirit tells the ex-combatants that they should come to meet Ambuya VaZarira for advice and consultation at a later date as right now there are too many people present.

Throughout the rest of the time that the spirit is there, he keeps reminding the ex-combatants to urge the rest of them to desist from neglecting and looking down on the traditional leaders, because otherwise there will be chaos in the country (field notes of *bira* at Ambuya VaZarira's home 26–27.1.2001).

The way in which on this occasion the spirit of Murinye that possessed Ambuya VaZarira both admonished war veterans for ‘neglecting the ancestors’, and was reconciled with them, offering to assist them in their land reform efforts, illustrates that the context of land reform across Zimbabwe may have been seen by Ambuya VaZarira (or rather her ancestral spirit Murinye) as a good opportunity for the reassertion of the role of spirit mediums, the ancestors and ‘tradition’ in Zimbabwe. But, contrary to what the chairman of the Provincial War Veterans Association, VaMhike, implied in the quotation above, Ambuya VaZarira is not, by any means, unfalteringly co-opted into the ZANU-PF land reform project. Indeed, earlier at the same *bira*, Ambuya VaZarira (not possessed at that stage) emphasised to those present that the lack of adequate rain they had experienced that season was because the government was not adequately consulting with the spirit mediums (field notes 26–27.1.2001). Later on the same day, her son, Peter Manyuki, explained to me how the previous night he had almost got into a fight with a war veteran:

who asked to see a programme for this *bira*, because he suspected that Peter and Ambuya were supporting the MDC [opposition political party]. This, Peter said, had made him very angry indeed because this *bira* was not about party politics, it’s about the role of the traditional leaders, *masvikiro* and chiefs in guarding the land, looking after the land. As he put it ‘I don’t care which party is in government, ZANU or the MDC, what we want is for the traditional leaders to be consulted and respected as the guardians of the land.’

On another occasion during a *bira* at Ambuya VaZarira’s home, a war veteran from a nearby farm stood up and produced an impromptu *pungwe*-like performance, singing liberation war songs and chanting ZANU-PF slogans, much to the obvious, though muted, distaste of Ambuya VaZarira and others present. Though Ambuya VaZarira seemed to put up with the event being taken over by the war veterans’ political agenda for some time, she was not to be surpassed for long. When the war veteran mentioned Mt. Beza, a hill bordering lake Mutirikwi which Ambuya VaZarira claims belongs to her ancestor Zarira, she made her feelings felt:

Comrade Ziki is talking about Mt Beza, which is VaZarira’s ‘traditional’ home, a place she claims her own. Comrade Ziki is explaining how they have occupied the farm and Mt. Beza now and Ziki tells Ambuya that she must nominate one person who can go and stay there.

Ambuya is angry now, and replies very sharply, outraged at this comrade’s audacity: ‘And who does Mt Beza belong to?’ – emphasising that Mt. Beza belongs to her *vadzimu* and it is therefore only the ancestors who can give out

that land, not Comrade Ziki (field notes of *bira* at Ambuya VaZarira's home 29–30.6.2001).

I later asked Ambuya VaZarira (int. 16.8.2001) about this incident:

Yes the war vets came. Beza is VaZarira's land. In Shona we call it '*Gadzingo resvikiro*', where she was ordained by her ancestors. The comrades came and urged me to go back. They came about five of them. I became very angry and told them I didn't want to hear anything about that place. I stayed there for ten years, when I came from Zvishavane. I stayed there when the white man who was there then had problems. His beasts were being eaten by lions, *mhondoro* lions [ancestral lions]. So the people [war veterans and settlers] who are there now found that it is quite difficult to stay there, and so they came to me. I asked them whether they were sent by the government, they said no. Then I told them if they were not sent by the government they should leave my house, and they went. They came back again on the day of that beer. I told them I do not want to go back there. That is when Chief Murinye said we should wait until we hear what these children have to say. I told them I was not interested in the fast track. I would not go with the fast track. I want to go back there with *chivanhu* [tradition]. And so Peter [her son] and two comrades went to that white guy who had given me a piece of land, and I was given another document, because when I first stayed in Beza I was given a document by the government. And the white man accepted he had given me 500 hectares. So I have a place where they say I should go and stay to look after the *mapa* and the mountain from where the *mhondoro* came out from. There are a lot of *mhondoro* on Beza.

It is also interesting to note that the *bira* described above was partly sponsored by war veterans from the Liberator's Platform who bought the cow and goat that were slaughtered for the occasion. As a group set up in opposition to the pro-ZANU-PF National War Veterans Association (Harold-Barry 2004: 31–42; Kriger 2003: 193), their agenda was markedly different from that of the local 'fast track' war veterans.<sup>34</sup> The local war veterans' *pungwe*-like performances only happened towards the very end of the two-day event, after the veterans from the Liberator's Platform had already departed, and in that context their performances appeared very uninspired and not particularly convincing. In a way Ambuya VaZarira seemed to be working these groups off each other, though she and her close associates continue to maintain that she 'does not take sides' but rather 'works with everyone who is concerned about the soil' (field notes 24.7.2004).

Ambuya VaZarira is a good example of a spirit medium who has been involved in extensive negotiations with war veterans redistributing land, without being co-opted into their political agenda. Rather, she seems to have tried to use the context of war-veteran-led land reform to further the agendas that she is involved in, both her own particular claims over Mt. Beza and Great Zimbabwe, but also wider resonating concerns about

the role of *chivanhu* ('tradition'), the ancestors and the *Mwari* shrines in Zimbabwe today. Perhaps the question that should be considered is not so much: 'to what extent have "traditional leaders" been co-opted into ZANU-PF's controversial land reform programme?' but rather: 'to what extent are war veterans acting out land reform being co-opted into the projects of spirit mediums, chiefs and others claiming a "traditional" right to land?' Furthermore, alongside a possible reassertion of technocracy, has land reform in Zimbabwe not also provoked a reassertion of the role of the ancestors? These are some of the fundamental questions that need to be addressed in the huge amount of research that remains to be done on Zimbabwe's changing landscapes.

#### CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF WATER, LAND AND THE STATE

In the emerging literature on 'the Zimbabwe crisis' (Hammar & Raftopoulos 2003: 1) there has been a tendency to emphasise either differences or continuities with the past. For example, on the relationship between war veterans and the ZANU-PF government, Norma Kriger (2003: 191) has argued that the currently central role of war veterans in 'contemporary politics in Zimbabwe recalls the early post-independence years'. In contrast, Ranger (2004a) has highlighted how the contemporary 'patriotic history' being promoted by the ruling party differs from its rhetoric of the early 1980s in its inclusion of ZIPRA's war record, the absence of a 'modernising, reconstructing and welfare agenda', and the creation of a 'new history in which Zimbabwe was a colony until 1980' (White 2003: 97). Similarly, on the land issue, or rather *issues* (Hammar & Raftopoulos 2003: 18), Sam Moyo has argued (2001: 11) that for the most part the 'essence' of land occupations has remained the same over the entire independence period. While acknowledging that 'land demands and their expression through occupations remained a constant', Alexander (2003: 99) has, on the other hand, emphasised some of the differences in ideology between the land occupations of the 1980s, and those that began in 2000.<sup>35</sup> Most importantly, like Ranger, she stressed that

grass roots nationalism in the early 1980s had encompassed a desire both for the return of land, and for an accountable, responsive state. Zanu (PF) in 2000 promised land, but at the price of an extreme and violent political intolerance that severely undermined the long-standing popular aspirations for a 'good' state, and labelled as enemies a range of social groups that had once been included in the nationalist constituency. It was not a revived, pre-independence nationalism that lay behind the wave of occupations in 2000, but a far narrower one.



While there is no cause to doubt that since 2000, ZANU-PF has indeed extracted a price of 'extreme and violent political intolerance',<sup>36</sup> I have tried to suggest in this paper that the ruling party's far narrower nationalist imagination of recent years has not necessarily obliterated or limited the nationalist imaginations of others. For spirit mediums, chiefs, war veterans and other 'traditionalists' who have felt themselves 'excluded' since independence, the current 'politics of exclusion' (Dorman 2003) may seem more like a renewed opportunity for their inclusion. The sometimes 'chaotic', 'violent' and 'unplanned' nature of the fast track land reform programme, may have left 'technocrats ... utterly sidelined' (Alexander 2003: 113) or ultimately lead to a 'reassertion of technocracy' (Chaumba *et al.* 2003a), but either way, in the process, new opportunities may also have been created for other languages, techniques and practices of water and land – other ways of imagining the landscape and even indeed the state itself – to emerge, and come to the fore. If there is a 'reassertion of tradition', this would represent both continuity (with an imagined or remembered pre-colonial order and of course the *chimurenga* legacy), and change (from the colonial and post-colonial order of bureaucratic, developmental technocracy). Either way it would be the next step in the 'continuous process of construction' of the state (Hansen & Stepputat 2001: 5); a process that often seems most creative on its margins (Das & Poole 2004; Tsing 1993, 1994; Worby 1998: 184), such as on resettled farms and occupied state land. Just as the construction of the Mutirikwi Dam created new possibilities for the imagination of the landscape and what to do with it, without obliterating the pre-existing history-scapes of local clans, similarly fast track land reform, and its accompanying authoritarian nationalism, have also created, for some at least, new possibilities in the imagination of landscape, water and the state.

## NOTES

1. The reverse is also true, as was emphasised by Edmore Mupfema during the Britain Zimbabwe Research Days in 2004, when he argued that Zimbabwe's 'historiography has been dominated by land at the expense of water' (Ranger 2004b: 15; see also Vincent *et al.* 2004: 5).

2. As Charles Jedrej commented 'articulation' is an interesting word that can mean both joined or jointed (as in 'articulated lorry'), or to express thoughts in words (possibly as in 'joined together in sentences'). When I initially wrote this I had the second meaning in mind, but in fact both meanings are appropriate to my argument here.

3. On African Independent Churches in the Masvingo area, see Daneel 1971, 1977, 1987 & 1998.

4. Although more localised studies of Zimbabwe's fast track land reform are needed, significant research is being carried out at the University of Zimbabwe (Hadzoi 2003; Mazarire 2003; Mubvumba 2005).

5. See Bourdillon (1987) for a powerful critique of David Lan's *Guns and Rain*, in which he suggests that Lan over-relied on one particularly charismatic medium; for another example see Ranger 1982.



6. With 1,425 million cubic metres of water, it is of course dwarfed by Lake Kariba, which has a capacity of 160,368 million cubic metres, and forms part of the national boundary with Zambia.

7. As Hughes (2004: 33) has put it, the Kariba Dam 'obliterated every ecological process extant on 5500 square km. No single project before or since has ever snuffed out this much life this fast.'

8. In 1989, two rhinos were killed in the Kyle Game Park by poachers posing as tourists (McCrea & Pinchuck 1993: 202).

9. 'Water hyacinth problem creating controversy in Zimbabwean lakes: weevils, toxic chemicals or inaction?', *Daily News* 12.9.2002.

10. See 'Severe pollution threatens Zimbabwe's largest water reservoir', *The Standard* 5.1.2003; 'Masvingo faces heavy pollution fine', *The Standard* 18.1.2003; 'Water Authority sues Masvingo council', *Daily News* 2.5.2003.

11. See 'A poignant reminder of President Mugabe's warped economic policies in Masvingo', *The Standard*, 20.8.2002; see also 'CIO invade holiday resorts', *The Standard*, 26.9.2004.

12. 'Stranded Tourists rescued', *Daily News*, 28.12.2000.

13. See also National Archives of Zimbabwe, files L2/2/117/46-8 & N3/24/34.

14. A 'traditional' event for which beer is brewed, usually involving spirit possession.

15. The Charumbira and Murinye clans are also involved in these contests. The Murinye and Mugabe clans are related, both are VaDuma and their territories lie adjacent to each other. They share many interests, but are also involved in simmering boundary disputes. As chief over Headman Nemanwa, Chief Charumbira claims this area lies within his boundaries. An influential member of the ruling party, he is also very close to the MP for the area, the former minister of foreign affairs, Stan Mudenge. In 2000 Fortune Charumbira was appointed MP himself, and subsequently served as deputy minister of local government (2003-05). He is currently the chairman of the Council of Chiefs. In these roles he has considerable influence on local issues. In July 2004, I heard rumours that he had promised Nemanwa elders that the Mugabe occupiers of the 'game park' were now to be removed.

16. A file held at the National Archives of Zimbabwe (labelled 968:91, but not yet catalogued) contains a report compiled by the district commissioner in 1981, which includes correspondence dating from 1973-1981 between Morgenster Mission, the DC Victoria district, PC Victoria Province & Minister of Internal Affairs about this issue.

17. Most of this area now falls under Nemanwa, and therefore under Chief Charumbira.

18. Parts of it are used for other functions such as tourist facilities, a local primary school, water works, and the Conservation Centre for the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe who manage Great Zimbabwe National Monument.

19. That was not only issue for which ancestral guidance and support was being sought. For others the focus of the *bira* had more to do with the longstanding Mugabe claim to the custodianship of Great Zimbabwe (Fontein 2006a).

20. At a local ZANU-PF meeting, Chief Charumbira informed Nemanwa elders that these settlers would be removed, as the land belonged to the Charumbira clan (field notes 22.7.2004).

21. I was told by people living in the nearby communal areas that gathering firewood from the game park has become increasingly difficult, as the occupiers are charging them money (field notes 25.7.2004).

22. He accused Chief Charumbira of acting 'as if Mugabe does not exist, saying that all Mugabe's land is his, and Charumbira's boundary is directly shared with Murinye' (field notes, 24.7.2004).

23. The Reformed Church of Zimbabwe at Morgenster Mission has long canvassed plans to build a university near Great Zimbabwe. The proposed site is in the area being claimed by the Haruzvivishe people. The RCZ had already established a university that was operating in Masvingo town, with a long-term view of moving to new premises near Great Zimbabwe, but in 2004 the University closed down amid accusations of maladministration (see 'TOSOT' in *The Masvingo Mirror* 23-29.7.2004). Later the idea found a new lease of life in statements by the former provincial governor, Josiah Hungwe, suggesting that the central government may take up the project (*The Masvingo Star* 23-29.7.2004).

24. Spierenburg (2003: 172-3) points out that the extent of mediums' mobilising power is not always clear. Bourdillon (1987) has suggested that during the war, guerrillas might have done more for spirit mediums' reputation than the other way around, and Spierenburg builds on this to suggest that opponents of the Mid Zambezi Project might have mobilised the mediums. Elsewhere I have argued that effective spirit mediumship is dependent on both the creative agency of an individual, and their ability to respond to, and engage with, the concerns of adherents (Fontein 2004).

25. See also Fairhead & Leach (1996); Leach & Mearns (1996); Moore & Vaughan (1994). Some of this work, especially in Zimbabwean studies (e.g. Maxwell 1999; Ranger 1999), has included more

subtle analysis, exploring how 'tradition' itself was a colonial construct that proved very useful for the Rhodesian state, and how 'traditionalists' used 'modernist' rhetoric in order to further particular interests. Similarly, Beinart & McGregor (2003: 17) argue that in recent literature 'more nuanced approaches to the history of science in Africa are now being canvassed'. Several chapters in their edited volume emphasise how colonial science 'could be sensitive to local knowledge', or 'be impressive' or even accepted by African communities.

26. Both Derman (2003: 77–82) and Manzungu & Kujinga (2002: 209–10) suggest that the process was stalled by the land invasions in 2000; it remains to be seen what role ZINWA has taken in land reform since.

27. Formerly known as AGRITEX, Department of Agricultural Technical & Extension Services (Chaumba *et al.* 2003a: 551, n. 34).

28. The most recent stage in this ongoing process was a 150% rise in the allowances of headmen, village heads and messengers, announced in February 2005 ('More Zanu PF "bribes" for traditional leaders', *The Standard*, 7.2.2005; 'Headmen grumble over allowances', *Financial Gazette*, 13.1.2005). During the National Assembly of Chiefs in May 2004, the chiefs announced their support for the government's land distribution programme, and President Mugabe's continued leadership of the party and government. At the same assembly they were also promised higher allowances and a new vehicle loan scheme (*The Herald*, 6.5.2004, 8.5.2004; *Zimbabwe Independent*, 14.5.2004; see also *The Masvingo Star* 23–29.7.2004).

29. In his comments on an earlier draft of this paper, William Wolmer suggested that the difference between their (Chaumba *et al.* 2003a) focus on 'technocracy', and mine here on 'traditional authority' is ultimately one of relative emphasis. He agreed that war veterans had indeed appealed to both, but warned that 'this doesn't take away from the significance of each' (pers. com. 7.4.2005).

30. One of the problems with Chaumba *et al.*'s analysis is that it presumes 'traditional authorities' are monolithic groups made up of 'local chiefs, headmen and traditional healers' (2003b: 599). While they are connected, it is important to note that only chiefs and headman are formally recognised, receive government allowances and so on, and that there are often important divisions between chiefs and spirit mediums. These often emerge in the context of chieftomship succession disputes. Interestingly Chaumba *et al.* do not mention spirit mediums at all, and one is left wondering whether they either do not exist in Chiredzi, or whether they come under the rubric of 'traditional healer', which seems very inappropriate given how most of the literature emphasises that there is a sharp distinction between the *n'anga* and the *svikiro* (e.g. Bourdillon 1987; Lan 1985).

31. It was in this way that Great Zimbabwe became imagined as a national sacred site, thoroughly associated with the ancestral legitimacy of the struggle (Fontein 2006a: ch. 7).

32. Indeed, recent newspaper reports, suggesting that some ZNLWVA war veterans have become disillusioned with the ruling party's failure to deliver on a variety of promises, illustrates effectively that war veterans have diverse agendas, and do not always work in collusion with the ruling party (see 'War veterans ditch Zanu PF', *The Standard*, 20.3.2005; see also Kriger 2003; McGregor 2002).

33. Mazarire has gathered fascinating material about recent, high-profile collaborations between war veterans, nationalist politicians and members of the Zhou-Mhiza clan making ancestral claims over an area of 'Chishanga' currently under the authority of Chief Mapanzure. These collaborations have emerged in the context of cleansing ceremonies held at a sacred place called Marungudzi, to settle the spirits of war dead troubling the ex-combatants (pers. com.). Similarly, Cox (2005) has discussed co-operation between spirit mediums and war veterans in Mount Darwin, in relation to the reburial of war remains buried in anonymous graves in Zimbabwe and abroad. This issue has recently received renewed attention in the media and from the ruling party (see 'Remains of liberation war fighter exhumed', *The Herald*, 10.7.2004; 'State to probe discovery of mass graves', *The Herald*, 16.7.2004; 'Mysterious deaths rock Kanyemba', *Sunday Mail*, 3.6.2001; '56 war vets reburied', *Daily News*, 25.10.2001).

34. One Liberator's Platform war veteran at the time said the purpose of the *bira* was 'to request that peace and tranquillity may exist in the country during the forthcoming presidential election' (field notes 29–30.6.2001).

35. Marongwe (2003: 163, 165) is also uneasy about Sam Moyo's view of recent land invasions as part of the longer continuum of an ongoing 'land occupation movement'. Stating that contests over land are not just focused on commercial farms, but occur across tenure regimes including state lands, communal and resettlement areas, Marongwe argues that the occupations of 1998–99 were 'community-led', while those of 2000 were instigated by war veterans as part of ZANU-PF's 'official campaign strategy'.

36. Other writers have produced powerful critiques of the government's land reform programme, particularly Rutherford (2001), which highlights the very difficult situation that farm workers have found themselves in since 2000.

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